PRESS RELEASE

Ombudsman examines Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (2 December) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the Government's operational arrangements for the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly.

The Government's current elderly care policy is to promote "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as backup". Introduced in September 2013, the Pilot Scheme supports frail elderly persons to age in place under the "money-following-the-user" mode. The second and third phases of the Pilot Scheme were implemented in October 2016 and October 2020 respectively. It has been about eight years since the Pilot Scheme was first launched. Based on their individual needs, holders of community care service vouchers can receive day care service, home care service (such as personal care, rehabilitation exercise and meal delivery) and residential respite service provided by service providers recognised by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

The Government has been conducting evaluations on the Pilot Scheme and implementing enhancement measures, which include increasing the number of vouchers, adopting more flexible service modes and inviting more organisations to participate in the Pilot Scheme and provide services. Meanwhile, there are views in the community that some elderly persons have insufficient knowledge of the Pilot Scheme, while some have never used the services with the vouchers they received. Government data show that between the years 2013/14 and 2020/21, the total number of vouchers available increased from 1,200 to 8,000. Nevertheless, as at 2020/21, of the total number of elderly persons given the vouchers over the years, more than 20% left the Pilot Scheme without ever using the service. On the other hand, as at July 2021, more than 7,000 elderly persons were waiting for subsidised community care services.

Ms Chiu said, "As the local population continues to age, demand for community care services for the elderly keeps rising. Being one of the key measures under the Government's elderly care policy, the Pilot Scheme is of significant public interest. It is still at the try-out stage eight years into implementation. The Government in recent years has allocated additional resources to provide more community care services for the elderly, and conducted evaluations and made improvements from time to time. However, there is still underutilisation of vouchers. Hence, I have decided to launch a direct

investigation to examine the operational arrangements for the Pilot Scheme, including service planning, the workflow of processing applications, measures to assist elderly persons to select service providers and monitoring of service quality and utilisation rates, as well as promotion and publicity efforts for the services, and will make recommendations for improvement to the Government where necessary."

The Office will launch this direct investigation with the SWD. The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to provide information and views on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by 1 January 2022:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre
168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong
Fax: 2882 8149
Email: complaints@ombudsman.hk

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For media enquiries, please contact the External Relations Section at enquiry@ombudsman.hk.